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The Republic of Kazakhstan to Participate in the UN Peacekeeping Activities:
Preparatory Groundwork, Challenges and Prospects for Cooperation [Zarina A.
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Annotation: *The article examines the initial stage of Kazakhstan’s involvement in the UN peacekeeping operations. The preparatory groundwork is carried out within the framework of the NATO. As the paper shows this process is very lengthy and complex, in which the country will face some problems. Yet, there are certain benefits that the state can get by becoming one of the participants of the UN peacekeeping.*

One of the basic UN fields of activity is peacekeeping. It is normally defined as "Military operations undertaken with the consent of all major parties to a dispute, designed to monitor and facilitate implementation of an agreement (ceasefire, truce, or other such agreement) and support diplomatic efforts to reach a long-term political settlement." [1]

Peacekeeping dates back to the years of 1946-1949 when a small number of militaries were sent to several countries (Palestine, India, Pakistan, Indonesia and the Balkans). In 1956 during Suez crisis UN troops were sent to Egypt to settle the conflict between Egypt, Great Britain, France and Israel. It indeed bettered the situation until the moment when UN forces were withdrawn, in 1967, renewing the Israeli-Egyptian war [2][3]. The importance of peacekeeping increased only with subsequent application of new techniques (peace enforcement). It was explained by the realities of that time when there was a shift in the nature of conflicts from the inter-state to intra-state. The issues to be resolved significantly increased in number and, moreover, became even more complex: human rights protection, restoration of justice, giving assistance in establishment of well-functioning governance, demilitarization and demobilization of the belligerents, stabilization of the situation, etc. Despite the failures of the UN peacekeeping in a number of countries (Rwanda, Yugoslavia and Somalia), and the criticism of the UN’s viability, its irreplaceable role still remains significant since no other global powerful structure has ever been established [4].

The young independent Republic of Kazakhstan, the ninth largest country in the world and the Central Asian leader, has inherited a part of the Soviet military legacy. After the USSR collapse Kazakhstan’s army totaled to approximately 20 thousand personnel. It was a home to the largest USSR space and nuclear test sites, such as Emba, Sary-Shagan (Priorsersk), Baikonur Cosmodrome and Semipalatinsk nuclear test site. In the first years of its independence (1991-1992) Armed Forces of the Republic of Kazakhstan retained structural

units of the former Soviet Army. However, later on these large units have been reduced and partly dismantled [5].

Currently Kazakhstan is on its first initial stage in the process of joining UN peacekeeping activities. In order to improve the level of militaries' training certain steps were undertaken with the assistance of western countries within the framework of NATO. From the 1990s NATO and the United Nations has been sharing a common commitment to the preservation of international peace and security. In accordance with UN Security Council resolutions, NATO was given a mandate to conduct operations in the Balkans and Afghanistan, and a framework for the NATO Training Mission in Iraq was created. These two organizations cooperate in a number of issues, among of which are information exchange, training and exercises, generalization of experience, planning and giving support in special circumstances, etc [6]. Military operations under the auspices of NATO are mandated by the UN. Thereby, by participating in the NATO training programs Kazakhstan is preparing itself for its subsequent participation in the UN peacekeeping operations. The point is that participation in the peacekeeping missions assumes taking great responsibility and without preliminary training and meeting global standards the country cannot join the UN forces.

Since the beginning of 2000 the creation of equipped and trained to NATO standards armed units, which would be ready to collaborate with the Alliance combat missions, has been a key point of military and political relations between the U.S. and Kazakhstan. **KAZBAT** was the first Kazakhstan's unit of this kind created in 2000. Recruitment is conducted solely by contract personnel (officers and sergeants) on a voluntary basis. Nobody can be forced to join this structure due to the assumed high risks.

From August 2003 till October 2008 **KAZBAT** soldiers were operating in Iraq, where they basically performed the task of demining, in other words mine clearing (in total about 5 million munitions were neutralized), water purification and health care delivery. Since 2005 within the framework of experience exchange **KAZBAT** instructors trained 572 cadets of the Military Academy of Iraq; and military doctors of Kazakhstan were involved in the medical group of the American Base "Delta". In total during the Iraq mission 9 **KAZBAT** rotations were made, which involved 290 soldiers. The experience of this small unit was positively evaluated by the American side, and Kazakhstan has become the first and only country in Central Asia which sent its soldiers to assist U.S. military operations abroad. On December 2006 **KAZBAT** was expanded (two more battalions, armed and equipped by NATO standards, were added), and the enlarged unit was renamed to **KAZBRIG**. And from that moment the UK shared US efforts in this venture [7].

In achieving the goals of improving, first of all, interoperability between the NATO and **KAZBRIG** and, secondly, **KAZBRIG**'s preparation for conducting operations abroad annual military exercise "*Steppe Eagle*" was initiated. It was launched in 2003 on the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Ilisky Training Center) by joint efforts of the U.S., UK and Kazakhstan. Starting from 2012 military exercises has been held a la "*Partnership for Peace*" with participation of soldiers from the USA, Great Britain, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Germany, Lithuania, France, Italy and other countries [8].

It is not as easy as it may seem to be to achieve NATO interoperability. According to the analysts, there are still some gaps in **KAZBRIG**'s structure. Out of 3 battalions only **KAZBAT**, the 1st battalion, is well-functioning. Concerning the rest, the 2nd is only partly trooped, while the 3rd is standing empty. The constant shortage of skilled military staff serving

for a long period, problems with standard weapons and equipment purchase are making meeting the goals set in the Kazakhstan's Individual Partnership Action Plan more difficult [9].

On July 1, 2008 as a part of the cooperation plan between Kazakhstan and NATO on the basis of the Military Institute of the Ground Forces for the first time in Central Asia a training center "Partnership for Peace" ("**KAZCENT**") was established. The main purpose of the center is to train soldiers of the Armed Forces of Kazakhstan, NATO countries and its partners to participate in peacekeeping operations. At a later date "KAZCENT" was recognized by the North Atlantic Alliance as the 19th Training and Education Center of "Partnership for Peace". Noteworthy, foreign partners, including the UK, USA, Turkey, Germany and others are actively contributing to the development of the center. There are certain requirements set by the United Nations, according to which an officer is selected to be sent to a mission:

- English proficiency
- Automotive vehicles driving skills
- Special equipment driving skills

Over 30 activities were held on the basis of "KAZCENT", among which are *"English military terminology in multinational operations"*, *"NATO staff procedures"* and *"Civil-military cooperation"*.

The Presidential Decree № 161, issued on October 11, 2011, approved the so-called *"Military Doctrine"*. Accordingly, one of the main tasks of the Republic's defense policy is the implementation of international obligations to maintain peace and security, including involvement in peacekeeping activities. Here are the basic principles of Kazakhstan's peacekeeping:

- Impartiality and complete neutrality preservation (not taking any sides of the parties)
- Absence of special relationship with any of the conflicting parties
- Rejection of both direct and indirect assistance to a conflicting party if it leads to the infringement of interests of other participants of the conflict.

What is Kazakhstan's advantage in this venture? During Iraq mission, one Kazakh soldier died and four militaries were injured. There are always risks and losses just the same as high awards are also attainable. What is essential here is to achieve a high level of military training. There may be many views in this regard, but it is commonly acknowledged that Kazakhstan's participation in the UN peacekeeping operations will bring more benefits than losses. First of all, Kazakhstan's officers will gain valuable practical experience in conducting peacekeeping operations abroad. Modern peacekeeping procedures obtained during missions can be introduced at the domestic level which, in turn, can fill the gaps existing at the national level.

Secondly, working in home country and working abroad among the strangers is two totally different experiences. Such practice will give opportunity for militaries to work in the international environment developing many other necessary skills (communicative, tolerance-nurturing, language, etc.). In addition, the importance of getting involved in peacekeeping missions is dictated by the state's ambitions and aspirations to make two good things at the same time: to help international community and improve own authority.

As concerning the other CIS countries, which were parts of the USSR in the past, they are already actively involved in peacekeeping activities. Thus, Russia has sent its observers and military units to join the international peacekeeping forces in Africa (Western Sahara, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sierra Leone, Congo, and Liberia), East Timor and the former Yugoslavia. Ukraine since 1992 has sent more than 25 units (25000 militants). In 2011 alone, 960 Ukrainian soldiers were sent to participate in 11 peacekeeping operations. Azerbaijan's military forces are currently in the NATO mission in Afghanistan. Armenian troops are involved in Kosovo and Afghanistan. More than 20 Kyrgyzstan's military personnel have served as UN military observers in Burundi, Liberia, Sudan and Sierra Leone. And the Republic of Kazakhstan strenuously prepares itself to be the next to join. During the mission in Iraq in 2003-2008 the USA, western countries and the whole world community, including the government of Iraq, gave very positive assessment of Kazakhstan's efforts. The country gained precious experience of being a part of multinational coalition and, moreover, the image of the country and prestige of its Armed Forces have been enhanced [10].

In 2002 the President Nursultan Nazarbaev set up an award called: "**For Participation in Peacekeeping Operations**". This medal is awarded to personnel who took part in peacekeeping operations conducted outside the territory of Kazakhstan. This award may play a role of accelerator in the process of involvement of Kazakhstan in the UN peacekeeping by stimulating military servicemen to get included into the Republic's military units.

One must also take into account the fact that this Republic does not intend to participate in the missions which provoke mixed public reaction. Thus, Kazakhstan's troops may be sent only to politically expedient and justified operations. Just to recall the past events, when Kazakhstan was about to join the mission in Afghanistan in 2011, and the former was threatened by Afghani extremists. In this connection the Republic of Kazakhstan refused to send its officers for security purposes.

Quite recently on December 20, 2013 the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan passed the bill, which approved sending of 20 military servicemen into the peacekeeping operation in **Cote d'Ivoire, Haiti, Liberia and Western Sahara** (5 military observers to each country). This is going to be the first long-awaited UN mission in which Kazakhstan will participate with an "**observer**" status. Its primary task will be to monitor the developments during the crisis situations in these areas and give an account to the UN. To this end, Kazakh military personnel will be unarmed. Once peacekeeping emerged exactly in this way: with the small amount of observers sent to a couple of countries.

Being currently at the initial phase to become a fully-fledged actor in peacekeeping activities, the state has ambitious plans for its future missions. It intends to send somewhere about 150 peacekeepers to different hotspots [11][12]. Kazakhstan can fully take part in the peacekeeping operations provided, firstly, successful implementation of the missions in which its militaries act as observers and, secondly, its military personnel reaches the UN standards, among which is high combat readiness. Despite challenges that may arise in this long-term process the perspective of the interaction between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the UN, indeed, seems to be promising. It is likely that very soon this country will finally get the status of full participant of the UN peacekeeping operations.

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